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NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE

THE NMFS-SPECIFIC PLAN TO MEET THE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RECREATIONAL FISHERY RESOURCES CONSERVATION PLAN

1996 - 2001

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Introduction

Importance of Recreational Fisheries

* Recreational marine fisheries and related industries are supported by annual direct expenditures from sport fishing of more than $7 billion.

* Nationwide, the sport fishing industry provides for more than one million jobs. The multiplier effect of these industries provides for billions of dollars in economic activity to the U.S. economy.

* Clearly, healthy fisheries greatly benefit the nation. These valuable resources must be managed to ensure that their benefits are sustainable.

NMFS Role in Recreational Fisheries

* The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is responsible for the stewardship of our nation's living marine resources and their habitat extending over more than two million square nautical miles of ocean and coastal areas known as the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

* NMFS' major activities include surveys of stocks, collection of catch data, research on living marine resources, protecting marine habitats and endangered and threatened marine species, protecting marine mammals, setting marine fish harvest quotas and other regulations necessary for conservation and management, and investigating seafood quality and safety issues.

* This plan is designed to build upon and strengthen NMFS commitment to the goal of providing for increased recreational fishing opportunities nationwide through the conservation, restoration, and enhancement of marine systems and fish populations, increasing fishing access, education and outreach, and increasing partnership opportunities. This plan is an outline of agency actions to overcome obstacles to healthy marine fishery resources and to help safeguard the valuable cultural and economic benefits that marine recreational fishing provides. While it is directed at enhancing recreational fishing opportunities, achievement of its objectives will benefit all users of our nation's marine fisheries resources.

President's Executive Order on Recreational Fisheries *

On June 7, 1995, President Clinton signed Executive Order 12962 - Recreational Fisheries. The Executive Order recognized the social, cultural, and economic importance of recreational fishing to the nation and directed Federal agencies to "improve the quantity, function, sustainable productivity, and distribution of U.S. aquatic resources for increased recreational fishing opportunities." Further, the Executive Order established the National Recreational Fisheries Coordination Council consisting of Secretarial designees from the Departments of Commerce, Interior, Agriculture, Defense, Energy, and Transportation, and the Environmental Protection Agency. The Coordination Council, in cooperation with Federal agencies, States and Tribes, and after consulting with the Federally chartered Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council, was directed to produce the Recreational Fishery Resources Conservation Plan. The Conservation Plan was unveiled on June 3, 1996 and set forth a 5-year agenda for Federal agencies that established: (1) measurable objectives to conserve and restore aquatic systems; (2) actions to be taken by Federal agencies; (3) accountability measures; and (4) evaluation criteria.

The Conservation Plan directs each Federal agency to develop an agency-specific implementation plan that identifies actions needed to meet the goals and objectives of the Plan.

Additionally, the Executive Order directed NMFS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to develop a policy that will reduce conflicts between the administration of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.) and recreational fisheries. NMFS and FWS published such a policy on June 3, 1996.

* Executive Order 12962 - Recreational Fisheries, is printed in its entirety as Appendix A to The Recreational Fishery Resources Conservation Plan.

National Recreational Fishery Resources Conservation Plan

Goal Statement from the National Plan:
"Provide for increased recreational fishing opportunities nationwide through the conservation, restoration, and enhancement of aquatic systems and fish populations, and by increasing fishing access, education and outreach, and partnership opportunities."

NMFS' Recreational Fishery Policy to Achieve the National Goal

I. ***Fish Stocks and Fisheries Habitat*** - Rebuild and maintain fish stocks and protect, enhance, and restore habitat critical to marine recreational fisheries. Ensure that fisheries management decisions affecting the status of fish stocks consider recreational fishing interests and that the data for making such decisions are collected and analyzed using the best available science.

II. ***Public Use*** - Support and encourage programs and projects designed to enhance marine recreational fishing opportunities for the public.

III. ***Public Education*** - Support, develop and implement programs designed to enhance public awareness and understanding of marine conservation issues relevant to the well-being of marine recreational fishing.

IV. ***Partnerships*** - Establish and encourage the establishment of partnerships between governments and the private sector to advance aquatic resource stewardship and enhance recreational fishing opportunities.

Plan Implementation

Implementation Strategy I

Conserve, enhance, and restore recreationally important fish stocks and their habitat.

OUTPUTS; *Fish Stock Management and Restoration*

Prevent overfishing of currently healthy recreationally important fish stocks during the effective years of the Plan.

Rebuild recreationally important fish stocks to levels consistent with producing maximum sustainable yield (MSY). For example, restore, where appropriate, recreationally important stocks to levels attaining or exceeding 20% spawning potential ratio (SPR).

Develop quantitative economic and social information on recreational fisheries and, based on this credible scientific data, develop effective models to be used by NMFS to ascertain the economic and social impact of fishery management decisions on the recreational community.

Complete research initiatives on tunas, billfishes, and sharks that will significantly enhance knowledge of stock relationships, species interactions, gear avoidance behavior and vulnerability, and geographical ranges.

When and where appropriate, establish partnerships for promoting catch and release programs as a management tool for conservation of recreationally important fish stocks.

OUTPUTS; *Habitat*

Develop, and provide to Regional Fishery Management Councils, essential fish habitat (EFH) guidelines that will assist in amending Fishery Management Plans in accordance with the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Act as amended by the Sustainable Fisheries Act of 1996.

In conjunction with the Regional Fishery Management Councils, identify and characterize critical habitats for recreationally important species under federal management.

Complete baseline habitat inventories by the year 2001.

Implementation Strategy II

Develop opportunities for increasing recreational fishing access and facilities in the marine environment.

OUTPUTS; *Access and Facilities*

Provide the Army Corps of Engineers with revised monitoring guidelines and criteria to be used for projects which include the use of artificial reefs for Federally permitted marine construction projects.

Complete Memoranda of Understanding (or similar agreements) with the states and industry to encourage environmentally responsible acquisition and/or expansion of public access opportunities for anglers and boaters.

Establish partnerships with appropriate organizations to provide for environmentally responsible expansion of recreational fishing opportunities for both young and elderly Americans.

Establish partnerships with appropriate organizations to provide for environmentally responsible expansion of recreational fishing opportunities for differently-abled Americans.

Establish partnerships with appropriate organizations to provide for environmentally responsible expansion of recreational fishing opportunities for citizens of the inner cities.

Implementation Strategy III

Promote public education and support for marine resource conservation and angling ethics.

OUTPUTS; *Education and Outreach*

In addition to NMFS Headquarter's Recreational Fishing (IRF) positions, establish Recreational Fishing Coordinator responsibility as collateral duties in an appropriate functional area in each of the NMFS Regional Offices.

Create recreational fisheries public outreach sections at all Regional offices.

Establish Marine Resources Merit Badge within Scouting and other similar programs.

Establish a liaison with the National Association of Science Teachers (NAST) to incorporate marine fisheries resources conservation into curricula and cosponsor teacher workshops with Sea Grant and National Marine Educators.

Hold annual public meetings in conjunction with state coastal zone management programs to obtain the recreational fishing community's input and involvement and to incorporate recreational fishing issues into marine resource agendas.

In partnership with States, industry and the Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council (SFBPC), NMFS will develop, promote and distribute a "Code of Conduct for Recreational Fishing."

Establish and publish procedures for ensuring the prompt and efficient notification of the public of issues of importance to the marine recreational fishing community.

Implementation Strategy IV

Work cooperatively with State and Tribal governments, industry, user and conservation groups and other potential partners to advance marine resource conservation, enhance recreational fishing opportunities and establish cost share programs.

OUTPUTS; *Cooperative Programs*

Establish criteria for NMFS to cosponsor youth, senior, inner city, and differently-abled fishing tournaments.

Establish, utilize and/or augment cost-share education programs with the Interstate Marine Fisheries Commissions.

Participate in joint efforts with other Federal agencies and the States to maintain, restore, and enhance recreationally important anadromous fish runs.

Ensure that reports and publications resulting from NMFS research on recreational fisheries are communicated to the public in understandable terms using the world wide web and other appropriate means.

REGIONAL SUPPORT ACTIVITIES

(These activities are not currently funded and are listed for future consideration as funding permits).

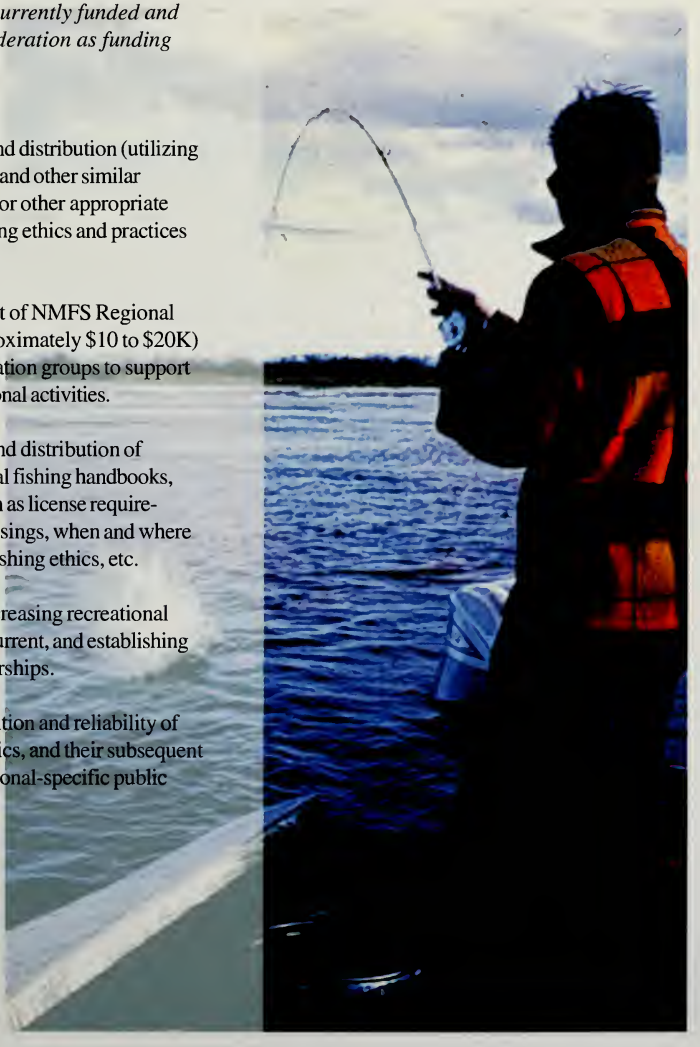
* Support the preparation and distribution (utilizing Saltonstall/Kennedy grants and other similar funding sources) of videos or other appropriate media on recreational angling ethics and practices in regional context.

* Support the establishment of NMFS Regional mini-grant programs (approximately $10 to $20K) for local nonprofit conservation groups to support recreational fishing educational activities.

* Support the publication and distribution of Regional marine recreational fishing handbooks, containing information such as license requirements, time of openings/closings, when and where to fish for certain species, fishing ethics, etc.

* Promote programs for increasing recreational fishing data by increasing current, and establishing new, tag and release partnerships.

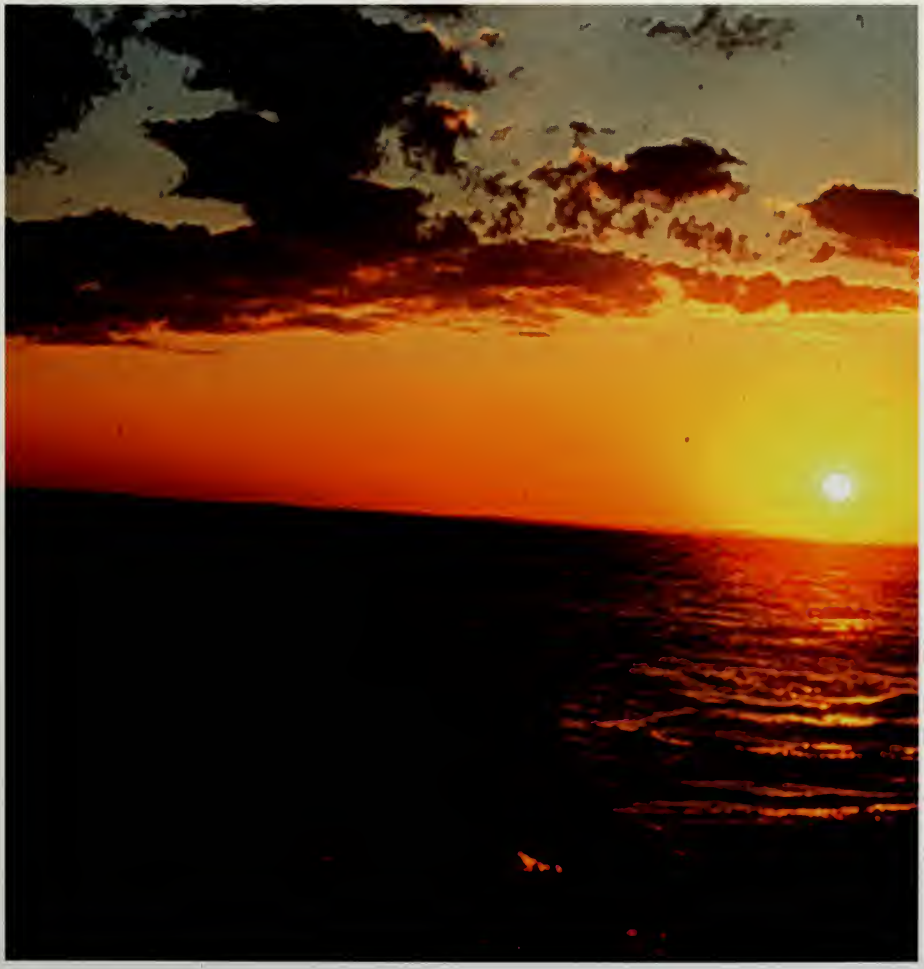
* Support expanded acquisition and reliability of recreational fisheries statistics, and their subsequent incorporation into a recreational-specific public information document.



EVALUATION

Each year at the end of March, as required by Executive Order 12962, a report will be provided to the Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council, utilizing currently captured and reported data, that will indicate progress made and whether more marine recreational fishing opportunities are being provided.

Additionally, NMFS is taking strong steps, in cooperation with the Interstate Marine Fisheries Commissions, States and stakeholders, to increase recreational fisheries data reliability, increase data comparability and accuracy, and allow for better and faster sharing of marine recreational fisheries data.



"The nation behaves well if it treats the natural resources as assets which it must turn over to the next generation increased and not impaired in value"

- Theodore Roosevelt

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